

DR. DEMAREE AND THE PALMER *DRYOPTERIS*

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"This is the spot," Doc announced flatly as we crossed the low water bridge just outside Shirley, Arkansas. His statement was uncanny; how could he possibly know this to be the place. However, I had learned that Doc always seemed to know where he was because some time in the distant past he had been there before. We had come a long way to find this "spot." A puzzle of old letters, questions, and roads taken almost at random had brought us here on this hazy, humid afternoon of 18 August 1974. All the pieces did seem to fit: the river, the sandstone bluffs, the old railroad bridge, and even the old field just as Doc had described it. In the three summers I had spent with Doc traveling the state plant collecting, I had not observed him to be easily excited over just any plants. Doc lives to collect plants, but I guess after you have seen and collected so many it eventually gets hard to get excited over another one.

Compared to Doc I was but a novice plant collector, so I must admit that my heart began to beat faster as I climbed out of the van and put on my pack. Doc decided he would stay around the vehicle, I think because he wanted to see if I could find it on my own just as he had many years ago. I headed out across the old field to its far edge where a narrow strip of woods separated the field and sandstone bluffs above. I did this because Doc had told me that E. J. Palmer would often collect along the borders of fields and woods so that he could easily get specimens from two very different habitats. It was here, then, that I sought the notorious Palmer *Dryopteris*.

The Palmer *Dryopteris* was originally discovered by E. J. Palmer near Shirley, Arkansas on 30 March 1928. Shortly thereafter, pteridologists including J. K. Small, W. R. Maxon, and E. T. Wherry, who saw Palmer's specimens, theorized that this plant represented a new taxon. Doc visited the site on 4 November 1932 and collected several specimens. Three years later D. M. Moore found the same plant on 3 November 1935. After this date, no collections were made, and the exact location was lost. Several later attempts to relocate plants were unsuccessful.

It was a typical August day in Arkansas, and soon my clothes were saturated with perspiration and insects were buzzing about feasting on any exposed skin. After following the tree line to the river with no success, I cut up into the woods and stumbled about on a rocky talus, carefully searching every likely place. Still there was nothing unusual and actually few ferns

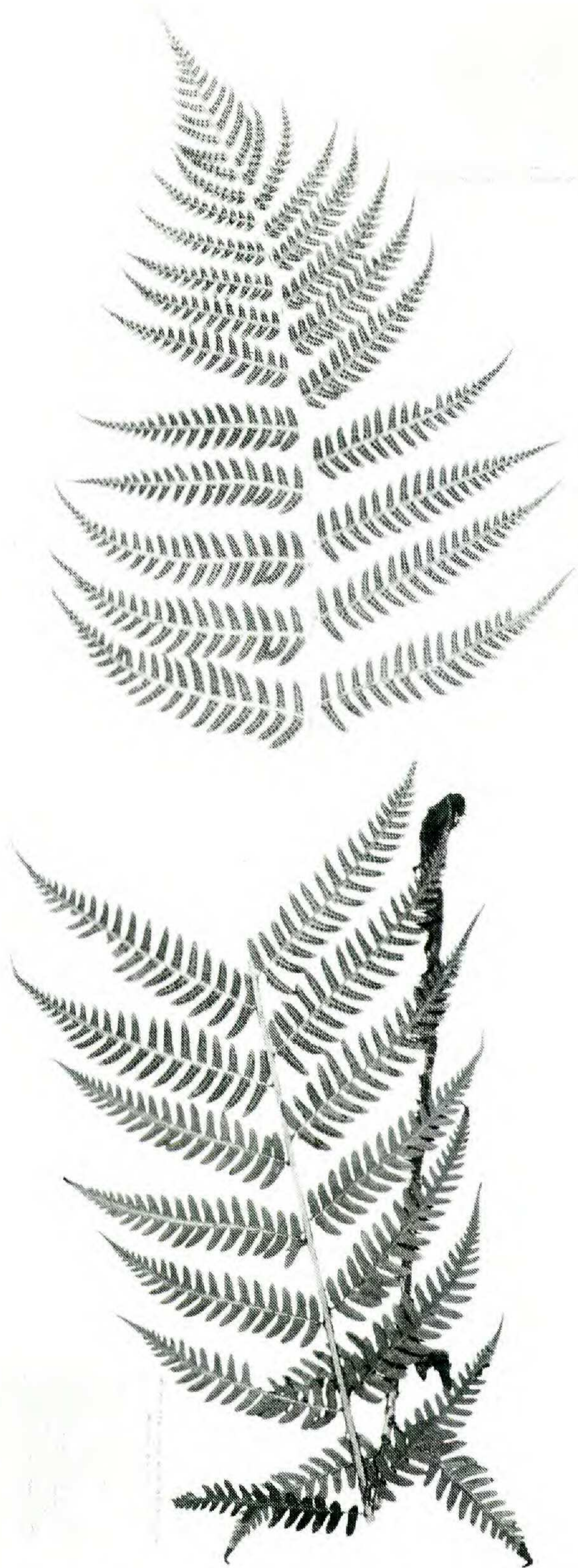


Fig. 1. Frond of the Palmer *Dryopteris* (*Dryopteris X leedsii* Wherry) collected on this date of its rediscovery in Arkansas 18 August 1974.

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